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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000011

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR B. NEULING
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE
AFR/SA FOR E. LOKEN

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [ZI](#) [MDC](#) [ZANU](#) [PF](#)
SUBJECT: GOZ INTENSIFIES ASSAULT ON MDC MUNICIPAL
GOVERNMENTS

REF: A. HARARE 1038
[1](#)B. 2004 HARARE 2035

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i., Eric T. Schultz under Section 1
.4 b/d

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) All 19 of Mutare's MDC city councilors resigned on January 4 in response to their December 29 suspension by Minister of Local Government Ignatius Chombo over alleged mismanagement. The Minister appointed an acting council of ruling party loyalists to run the city. Chombo also suspended the MDC executive mayor of Chitungwiza, Mishek Shoko, on December 29. These moves follow an announcement by the Ministry that overdue urban council elections for Harare, which has been governed by an ZANU-PF acting mayor and commission since December 2004, would be postponed until [1](#)2007. Three of Zimbabwe's four largest cities have now had their elected MDC councils removed by the central government and are now under ruling party control. End Summary.

GOZ Takes Over Mutare

[1](#)2. (U) By letter on December 29, Chombo suspended Mutare's full City Council - all 19 members of which were elected MDC representatives. According to the GOZ-controlled Herald newspaper, a commission appointed by Chombo would manage the city's affairs during an investigation into alleged mismanagement by the elected council. Heading the commission would be Kenneth Saruchera, a ZANU-PF ex-council member and former party provincial spokesperson. The suspensions followed the July suspension of Mutare's MDC mayor, Misheck Kagurabadza (ref A).

[1](#)3. (SBU) The councilors responded by submitting a collective letter of resignation dated January 4 (e-mailed to AF/S), in which they blasted the Ministry for its incessant interference with the Council's business, including the freezing of its budget despite hyperinflation, the unlawful overriding of its personnel decisions, and the confiscation of its vehicles. They asserted that the investigation's findings were a foregone conclusion and explained that they would save ratepayers' money by resigning.

[1](#)4. (C) Suspended Mayor Kagurabadza reiterated to the Embassy on January 5 that Chombo was on a mission to destroy all MDC municipal councils. He noted that Chombo's Mutare commission was packed with ZANU-PF loyalists) some of whom had already been rejected by the Mutare electorate. One commissioner, for example, was Ellen Gwaradzimba, who Kagurabadza had handily defeated with over 80 percent of the vote in the last mayoral race. Kagurabadza said he remained suspended but had not resigned and the "investigation" of specious allegations against him continued.

[1](#)5. (C) Kagurabadza questioned the utility of the opposition participating at all in municipal elections given its experience since nearly sweeping the last national urban council elections in 2003. He said the party leadership had not addressed the participation issue in view of its division and disarray but added that the party's provincial leadership recently met with the suspended council and recommended that it resign.

Chitungwiza Mayor Also Booted

[1](#)6. (U) According to independent press reports, Chitungwiza Mayor Misheck Shoko confirmed that he had received a suspension letter from Chombo on December 29. The state media reported on December 30 that Shoko had been suspended to stem the municipality's failure to provide services in Zimbabwe's third largest city, a sprawling dormitory community for the capital. MDC Deputy Mayor Collins Gwiyo would serve as acting mayor pending the probe's conclusion.

17. (C) In a late November meeting, Shoko outlined to us the various efforts undertaken by Chombo's Ministry to undermine the city's local governance. Most significantly, the ZANU-PF town clerk nearly one year ago had diverted a supplementary Z\$5 billion (US\$1.25 million at the then official exchange rate) disbursement from the Reserve Bank (RBZ), most of which went to Chombo himself for use in the March parliamentary elections. According to Shoko, Chombo had also diverted Z22 billion of Chitungwiza's money to discharge debts of Harare, which is being run by a ZANU-PF-appointed commission.

18. (C) Shoko said that when the Ministry tried to hold him accountable for resulting booking discrepancies, the popular war veteran enlisted the support of RBZ Governor Gideon Gono. Shoko said that Gono's investigation exonerated him and that Gono had advocated on his behalf with Chombo and Mugabe. Nonetheless, Chombo had continued to thwart Shoko's personnel moves, including his effort to fire the clerk, and dispatched his Ministry's district administrator to disrupt and override his executive decisions. Moreover, the GOZ continued to withhold money due the city while the ruling party deployed its loyalists in disruptive "protests" against the mayor.

19. (C) Shoko said the acting mayor, a former ZCTU official, has a history of vigorously opposing the ruling party. He predicted that the GOZ would eventually install a ZANU-PF loyalist as mayor.

Harare Election Postponed

10. (SBU) On December 22, the independent press reported that Chombo had once again postponed elections for Harare's city council, until March 2007. The move will leave the capital's governance under the control of a Chombo-appointed commission with former MDC deputy mayor turned ZANU-PF loyalist Sekesayi Makwavarara at the helm (ref B). The election's postponement would appear to violate Zimbabwe's Urban Councils Act, which stipulates that a commission may run a city only for a maximum of six months. The Combined Harare Residents Association has challenged the formation of the commission and the lack of timely elections in court, so far without success.

Comment

11. (C) No longer content with hamstringing opposition-run local governments, the ruling party appears to be moving to systematically replace them with commissions of ZANU-PF loyalists. Given this continuing assault, it is hardly surprising that the opposition party may be reconsidering its participation in local elections. Tsvangirai's mainstream faction of the MDC could choose to extend its electoral boycott to include the nationwide urban council elections scheduled for August, elections in which it would otherwise likely do very well. However, this approach carries risks for ZANU-PF as well. They will now have to take direct responsibility for providing city services in both Mutare and Chitungwiza. In Harare, the commission has performed poorly and has further undermined the ruling party's popularity in the capital. Residents have taken to calling Harare "pothole city." We may very well see this pattern repeated in the country's other urban areas.
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